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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the concept of communicative humanistic acculturation teaching techniques and presents examples of activities used in university English-as-a-Second-Language classes in South Korea. The activities elicited the aid of students in the roles of advisor, facilitator, and counselor to the teacher in his ongoing struggle to cope with adjustment to living in Korea. Some of the activities included a gift ranking activity (helping the teacher determine what kinds of gifts to buy for his Korean-born fiancee's family), a meeting future in-laws role play, reaction to a video of the teacher's trip to his fiancee's home and neighborhood in Japan, and an essay writing activity in which students created short essays comparing and contrasting themselves to a sibling or close friend. These activities enhanced learners' acquisition of English by: (1) providing realistic, purposeful communicative encounters that motivated students to express themselves; (2) establishing a personal relationship between students and the foreign teacher; and, by extension (3) fostering positive attitudes toward the language, culture, and people of the United States. An appendix includes the teacher's autobiographical dictation used in one class activity. (Author/SM)

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*CHAT in EFL — Communicative Humanistic Acculturation Techniques**

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*CHAT in EFL – Communicative Humanistic Acculturation Techniques**

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This paper introduces the concept of communicative humanistic acculturation teaching techniques and presents examples of activities used in university EFL classes in South Korea. The activities elicited the aid of the students in the roles of adviser, facilitator, and counselor in the teacher's on-going struggle to cope with adjustment to living in Korea. They enhanced learners' acquisition of English by (1) providing realistic, purposeful communicative encounters that motivated students to express themselves; (2) establishing a personal relationship between students and the foreign teacher; and, by extension, (3) fostering positive attitudes toward the language, culture, and people of the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Preliminary versions of the title of this paper contained the words "exposing myself in the classroom." Although I decided to select the more technically descriptive title, I still think that "exposing myself" rather accurately captures the gist of the paper: the idea of getting personal in the language class in ways that will enhance the learning experience.

A while back, I had the occasion to visit an old friend, Rob, with whom I had served in the Peace Corps in Korea many years ago. Rob was still involved in the business of teaching English as a second language but no longer to bright-eyed, eager, and innocent Korean university students. Instead, he had found a teaching job in a maximum-security prison. Certainly there must be a great deal of satisfaction involved in that kind of teaching, but one thing he told me about his job made a very memorable impression on me. He was not allowed to give out any sort of personal information about himself, his friends, or his family—not even real names. As a long-time English language teacher I was stunned at the thought of the limitations of such a teaching situation. I found the notion totally stifling! When you develop relationships with people, you have to share information, opinions, attitudes, and values—not to do so creates a cold, impersonal, environment. It may be businesslike and efficient, but it is certainly not "humanistic."

As we know, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) purports to be based on a humanistic philosophy of education as one of its cornerstones (Dubin, & Olshtain, 1986; McNeil, 1977), and I guess what humanism really means is that we should develop real human relationships with students. By doing so, we accomplish more than just being nice people. A warm relationship of mutual human respect leads students to like their teacher, and then, by extension, to like their class, the learning, the target language, the target culture, and the people who are members of that culture. All this liking, that is, this

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set of positive attitudes, serves to enhance and maximize the learning process. The facilitating effect of positive attitudes is a well-established and well-accepted principle of second language acquisition, supported by numerous empirical studies, and perhaps more importantly, it is an intuitively appealing and obvious notion.

A Chat Activity For Day One

So I had my humanistic principles in mind a couple of years ago when I was scheduled to meet my new English classes for the first day of teaching at Jeonju University in South Korea. I had been offered the opportunity to return to the country where I had spent my Peace Corps days, this time for one semester as an exchange professor. On that first day, I had the above-mentioned set of humanistic affective goals in mind, but I also had in mind a set of cognitive/academic/diagnostic goals as well. I had no clear idea of the students' proficiencies in any of the skills of English, especially listening comprehension and speaking. So I was looking for a first-day, get-acquainted type activity that would satisfy both sets of objectives. I came up with the Teacher's Autobiographical Dictation (adapted from Davis & Rinvolucri, 1988). In this activity, the teacher prepares sentences about various aspects of his (the masculine pronoun is used because the teacher is male in this case) life: childhood, school days, professional life, hobbies, etc. He presents them to the class in groups of four sentences of which three are true and one is untrue. As students listen to the sentences, they are instructed to write down only the ones they believe to be untrue. It is a matter of guessing since they have no real way of knowing the information. As the students listen and write, the teacher can walk around observing how well they are able to comprehend and reproduce the sentences. This process provides an informal diagnosis of both listening comprehension and writing.

Below is an example set of statements about my graduate school days at the University of Texas that I made up and shared with the TexFLEC audience in Austin. In the presentation, it provided a link between many audience members and me and helped the rest of the presentation to go smoothly. "Listen carefully and write down the sentence that you think is not true," I instructed.

A. I lived in housing made from converted WWII Army barracks.

B. I took three courses from Dr. Bordie.

C. I taught at the Texas IEP where I had an office in a closet.

D. I didn't care much for Austin, but I liked the University.

(Of course choice D is untrue. Who couldn't love Austin?)

The appendix contains a complete list of the statements I used in Korea for this activity. The statements are designed to provide leads to various aspects of U.S. culture and life that can be exploited in further class-

room communication. They also led to the sharing of several bits of rather personal information about the teacher such as being an overweight child, not having a steady girlfriend in high school, going through a divorce, and the death of a beloved pet dog. I realize that some teachers may not feel comfortable discussing such personal issues in class with their students. In any humanistic activity, participants should always have a clearly understood option not to participate if they prefer, (Moskowitz, 1978). Likewise, in this activity the teacher controls the content of the dictation and has the option not to include whatever he chooses not to reveal. I myself was totally comfortable sharing these details, and I felt closer to the students for having done do.

Step two of this activity involved placing students into groups of four or five. Each group was to discuss the sentences and arrive at a group consensus as to what the untrue statements were. Of course, this was a communicative activity that required much discussion and negotiation of meaning. It also provided an opportunity for the teacher to observe and diagnose students' speaking proficiency levels. Each group reported their consensus to the class as a whole and the teacher finally revealed the false statement and elaborated on the discussion of each statement.

As a follow-up activity, students were asked to prepare for homework similar sets of true/untrue statements about themselves to share with others in small groups in the next class. I was very pleased with the success of the Teacher's Autobiographical Dictation activity: It captured the interest of the students; it immediately put them at ease with the daunting new foreigner in their midst and planted the seeds for a warm personal relationship and positive array of attitudes; it motivated them to use their English for real communication; and it provided me with the academic diagnostic information I needed for curriculum planning.

The Power Of Acculturation In ESL Learning/Teaching

So next I began considering what else I could do to maximize the development of communicative skills in this EFL environment. I had previously had plenty of teaching experience both in EFL and ESL contexts. It was painfully obvious that the most rapid and efficient development of English communication skills was in ESL contexts such as those of Saint Michael's English Language Programs where I currently teach. What exactly is it that promotes language learning and communication skills so well in the ESL context? Of course the obvious answer is the unlimited amount of exposure to English the total immersion environment provides; there is no substitute for quantity of exposure. But, to go beyond the obvious, let us try to examine some specific outcomes of the ESL immersion model that contribute to learners' success.

I have observed that some learners progress much better than others in the ESL context. These are the ones, I believe, who more actively engage themselves in a dynamic ac-

culturation process—a process that creates a multitude of interactions in which real communicative needs have to be satisfied for the learner's very survival. There are several aspects to this survival. (1) There is survival in terms of *basic human needs*. They have to interact in English to accomplish the numerous transactions involved in life: obtaining food and shelter, paying bills, buying things, etc. Lots of language learning takes place when our basic human physical needs are at stake. (2) Then there is survival in *the academic sense*. ESL students have to acculturate themselves to new expectations, processes, and norms of academic life in the United States. This aspect of acculturation also requires a lot of communication and language development as English becomes the sole vehicle for academic activity. (3) Thirdly, there is *social survival*. ESL learners in the United States must develop social relationships with others through English both outside the classroom and inside as well. Outside, the more successful learners seek out relationships with Americans and fellow ESL learners from other cultures. They make friends, and in the process develop their sociolinguistic competence. Inside the classroom too, there is a powerful social dynamic taking place. Students find themselves thrust into a random group of fellow learners who represent, ideally, a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Their experiences differ greatly, as do their beliefs and values. They need to seek out common ground and create bonds in order to work and learn together as a cohesive unit. The learner becomes the representative of his or her culture and feels an obligation to describe and explain its ways as he or she finds out about the ways of others. It is a wonderful and beautiful acculturation process that is one of the best parts of ESL study.

Applying Acculturation Techniques In EFL Contexts

Of course diversity of this nature and its resulting acculturation processes do not exist in the EFL situation in locations such as South Korean universities. Comparing the EFL context to that of ESL point by point, first, there is very limited exposure to the target language and the target language fulfills little if any real communicative purposes. It is not used to provide basic human needs, it is not the vehicle for academic survival, nor is it used for social interactions. Rather than a diverse group of fellow learners using English to forge new bonds and exchange cultural information, the Korean students' fellows are already well known to one another and share virtually identical cultural backgrounds. In short, there are no acculturation processes to propel the language learning. There is no compelling need to communicate in English.

But soon I came to realize—perhaps as I struggled to open a bank account, buy a bus ticket, or greet a colleague in my elementary Korean—that there certainly was a dynamic acculturation process taking place. It was I, the helpless foreigner, who was engaged in the acculturation strug-

gle—not my students. I should try to take advantage of this acculturation process to create communicative purposes that might enhance the communicative skills of my students. Following humanistic principles, I would open up my life to them and let them vicariously experience my attempts to acculturate myself to my new environment. I would rely on their inherent Korean sense of generous hospitality to motivate them to try to help me in my struggle to survive. I would also call upon their strong pride in their own fascinating culture to motivate them to educate this "ignorant Westerner" in their customs and value system.

The "Helpless Foreigner" Scenario

The idea itself is nothing new. I am quite certain that a lot of foreign teachers make use of the "helpless foreigner" scenario from time to time. I recall a very effective writing assignment I gave to a class at a Japanese university years ago when I had just begun a teaching position there. I had a brand new bank account with a shinny new ATM card. The only problem was that the instructions on the machine were written entirely in Japanese *kanji* and *kana* characters. Reading the instructions and using the machine were beyond me. I shared my dilemma with my class and gave them the assignment of going to my specific bank and writing a clear set of instructions in English, complete with diagrams, for performing the various functions I needed to perform on the ATM. It was great! I was finally able to retrieve my cash! And the students had used their English for a truly useful real-life communicative purpose. We were all happy, and, on the affective side, we bonded a bit.

Countless language activities using any or all language skills can be developed that allow EFL students to provide useful information that the foreign teacher truly needs to survive in and to better understand the host culture. Some examples include:

How to take a train/bus to ____.

What/how to order in a restaurant.

What kind of holiday is ____?

Using Chat Activities In Korea

The following are brief descriptions of several other ways in which I made use of the Communicative Humanistic Acculturation Technique during my semester in Korea.

Gift Ranking Activity

I told the class about my engagement to Sinyoung, a Korean born and raised in Japan, along with information about her family. I explained that I would travel to Japan over the Ch'usok holidays (a kind of Korean Thanksgiving) to meet the family for the first time. I was having trouble deciding what to take as a gift for the family. In small groups, students discussed the question and mutually agreed on the five best gift ideas in order of preference. Each group then reported their results to the whole class. Much explanation of traditional

Korean gift items was required as well as information on cost of items and where they could be bought in the local area, how to get to the store or market, etc.

Meeting Future In-Laws Role Play

As a follow-up activity to the previous gift-ranking activity, I admitted to the class that I was quite nervous about meeting my future in-laws. How should I act? What should I say? What will they say, ask, and do? I then had groups prepare role plays enacting the scene and playing the roles of Sinyoung her father, her mother, and me. Scripts were generated, skits were rehearsed, and finally they were presented in class and recorded on videotape. After viewing the videos, the class could discuss and evaluate each group's efforts, perhaps even casting votes on best skit, best actor, actress, etc.

Reacting to Video of Japan Trip

I showed the class a video that I took on my trip to Japan that included scenes of my fiancee's home, a typical residential neighborhood, a supermarket, a meal in a Japanese restaurant, and various points of interest in Kyoto and Osaka. I asked students to react in writing to what they saw, discussing their impressions of Japan. Because of historical realities, Koreans have deep seated, often negative, emotional reactions to Japan. Many students wrote that viewing the country through this vicarious personal connection caused them to see Japan very differently, in a much more positive manner than they otherwise might have. Many of their papers were quite touching.

Two-Brothers Midterm Exam

The personal humanistic aspects of CHAT can be applied even on something as formal and impersonal as a test. As part of a mid-term exam, I used true personal data about my brother and myself. The students had studied basic sentence combining techniques through a textbook exercise on the Kennedy brothers (e.g., while John, Robert, and Edward Kennedy each shared the same environmental influences growing up, they turned out to be quite different adults). Following that example, I created a similar exercise that compared me to my brother. After combining the sentences into a guided paragraph, students created short essays comparing and contrasting themselves to a sibling or close friend.

CONCLUSION

While the EFL environment often presents more challenges and fewer opportunities for language acquisition than does the ESL context, the employment of CHAT—communicative, humanistic, acculturation techniques—can help capture some aspects of the ESL context that make it such an effective acquisition environment. The *communicative* aspect provides realistic and purposeful exchange of information and motivates learners to express themselves. The *humanistic* aspect establishes personal relationships among students and teacher and fosters positive attitudes toward all aspects of the lan-

guage, culture, and learning experience. The *acculturation* aspect exploits a process of adapting to and surviving in a new environment to propel the learning experience. In the EFL teaching context, the acculturation process of the foreign teacher substitutes for that of the students in ESL contexts.

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APPENDIX
TEACHER'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL DICTATION

You will hear groups of four sentences about your teacher. Only three of the sentences are true. Write down only the one statement that you think is **not true**.

Childhood
I was born in the state of Missouri.
I never went to kindergarten.
I was always a skinny kid. (false)
I was a pretty good student.

High School Days
I played on my high school football team.
I had a steady girlfriend. (false)
I got my driver's license when I was 16.
My favorite sport was tennis.

University Days
English was my major. (false)
I lived in an apartment off-campus.
I rode a motorcycle to school.
I tried skiing for the first time.

Peace Corps Days
I taught English at Dongguk University.
I got married in Korea to a Korean woman.
I got a black belt in Taekwondo.
I traveled to Thailand on my winter vacation. (false)

After Peace Corps
I worked in the world's tallest building.
My wife and I had one son, no daughters.
I went back to the University of Missouri for graduate school. (false)
We came back to Korea for another two years.

In Japan
I worked for Waseda University in Tokyo. (false)
I had a van and a motorcycle.
My son could speak Japanese better than I.
My wife and I got a divorce.

In Vermont
I drive a red sports car.
I have a large dog. (false—my dog recently died)
I live alone in a big house.
I play an electric guitar.

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